

Message Text

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PAGE 01 TUNIS 01033 191512Z

47

ACTION NEA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 AID-05

EUR-12 EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 /078 W

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R 191440Z FEB 75

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8264

C O N F I D E N T I A L TUNIS 1033

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, OVIP, TS

SUBJ: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA RETURNS FROM VACATION

REF: TUNIS 375

1. SUMMARY: ON FEBRUARY 19, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA RETURNED TO TUNIS FROM HIS MONTH-LONG VACATION IN FRENCH ALPS AND IN GENEVA. DESPITE PERSISTENT RUMORS THAT HIS HEALTH HAS NOT BEEN GOOD, HE APPEARED VIGOROUS AT AIRPORT WHERE HE PRAISED PRIME MINISTER NOUIRA'S MANAGEMENT OF TUNISIAN ECONOMY. PRESS ACCOUNT OF ARRIVAL ALSO CARRIED STATEMENT THAT PEACE IN MIDDLE EAST COULD NOT BE ACHIEVED UNTIL GREAT POWERS REACHED ACCORD AND US PRESSURED INTRANSIGENT ISRAEL. END SUMMARY.

2. ON FEBRUARY 19, PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA RETURNED FROM HIS MONTH-LONG VACATION IN MEGEVE, FRANCE, AND IN GENEVA. AT AIRPORT WELCOMING HE TOLD PRESS, WHICH LATER DESCRIBED HIM AS "OVERFLOWING WITH VITALITY" AND "GLOWING WITH HEALTH," THAT HE WAS PLEASED WITH EFFECTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT IN DEALING WITH ECONOMIC SITUATION AND CALLED RECENT FINANCIAL TIMES OF LONDON AWARD OF "OSCAR" TO TUNISIA FOR PERFORMANCE AGAINST INFLATION A TRIBUTE TO HEDI NOUIRA. PRESS ACCOUNT OF ARRIVAL ALSO CARRIED REMARKS BOURGUIBA HAD MADE TO SWISS TV THAT PEACE COULD NOT

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PAGE 02 TUNIS 01033 191512Z

BE ACHIEVED IN MIDDLE EAST UNTIL THE TWO SUPER POWERS

REACHED ACCORD AND THAT PEACE WOULD REMAIN DISTANT
UNTIL THE US USES ITS WEIGHT TO PRESSURE AN INTRANSIGENT
ISRAEL.

3. BOURGUIBA TOLD PRESS AT AIRPORT THAT HE HAD MOVED
FROM MEGEVE TO GENEVA BECAUSE HE WAS NOT SLEEPING WELL
AT HIGH ALTITUDE AND BECAUSE HE NEEDED A MEDICAL CHECK-
UP.

4. COMMENT: BOURGUIBA'S REVELATION TO PRESS THAT HE
HAD NOT RPT NOT BEEN SLEEPING WELL AT HIGH ALTITUDE
WAS CONFIRMED EARLIER TO AMBASSADOR BY SEVERAL TUNISIAN
OFFICIALS CLOSE TO PRESIDENT. RUMORS CIRCULATING THAT
PRESIDENT HAS SUFFERED RELAPSE AFFECTING HIS MENTAL
CAPACITIES ARE PROBABLY UNTRUE. HIS VIGOROUS DEMEANOR
AT AIRPORT SUGGESTS, AT THE VERY LEAST, THAT HE IS
READY TO RECEIVE BELGIAN KING AND QUEEN ON STATE VISIT
FEBRUARY 21-24. PRESIDENT'S RETURN FROM VACATION HAS
ALSO GIVEN RISE TO SPECULATION THAT CABINET CHANGE IS
IMMINENT, WITH MOST ATTENTION FOCUSING ON MINISTRY OF
FOREIGN AFFAIRS.

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: HEALTH, CHIEF OF STATE VISITS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 19 FEB 1975
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: KelleyW0
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975TUNIS01033
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750059-0584
From: TUNIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750229/aaaabamy.tel
Line Count: 83
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION NEA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 75 TUNIS 375
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: KelleyW0
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 JUN 2003 by KelleyW0>; APPROVED <12 NOV 2003 by KelleyW0>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: PRESIDENT BOURGUIBA RETURNS FROM VACATION
TAGS: PINT, OVIP, TS, (BOURGUIBA, HABIB)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006